

SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,
University of Toronto*

*Concert Hall,
Edward Johnson Building*

The Guarneri String Quartet

Anton Kuerti, pianist

Arnold Steinhardt - Violin

Michael Tree - Viola

John Dalley - Violin

David Soyer - Cello

Thursday, February 15th, 1968

8:30 p.m.

Program

QUARTET IN C MINOR, OP. 18, No. 4

Beethoven

Allegro ma non tanto

Scherzo: Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto

Menuetto: Allegretto

Allegro

The six Quartets of Beethoven's Op. 18, though published in 1801, were composed over the preceding five years or more. The publication order is not chronological: earliest composed, evidently, was the D major, No. 3 of the set; whereas the last to be written was this work in C minor.

The opening movement displays less characteristic, more conventional materials than his piano sonatas of the same key from this period, Op. 10, No. 1, and Op. 13. But the music shows Beethoven's strong personality all the same, in the incisive punctuating quality of the chords and group unisons that conclude each of the main theme-groups, and in the way the minor mode returns in the coda following a series of false hopes raised by a lyrical stopover in the major.

In lieu of a genuinely slow movement, Beethoven places a moderately-paced example of his fanciful scherzando style. Its opening is quasi-fugal, similar to the finale of the Piano Sonata Op. 10, No. 2, the second movement of the First Symphony, and other movements of around this time. The rhythm of the piece is less a scherzo than an Austrian *Ländler* or folklike waltz. The second theme even anticipates a famous waltzing motive from Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*.

There follows a chromatically-shaded Minuet, whose inherent drooping expressiveness is held in check by its traditional dance rhythm. The graceful, relaxed trio, on the other hand, is punctuated by pause-chords that interrupt the continuity of the dance.

The gypsy rondos of Josef Haydn seemingly served as model for Beethoven's finale. The theme is varied slightly at each recurrence. The prolonged coda-section amounts to a four-way discussion as to whether the movement is to end in major or minor.

QUARTET IN F MAJOR

Ravel

Allegro moderato (Très doux)

Assez vif, très rythmé

Très lent

Vif et agité

Ravel's chamber-music output in so-called "abstract" style is dominated by three works — this Quartet, the Sonata for violin and cello, and the Piano Trio. Of these the Quartet was the earliest and also the most free and flamboyant in conception. Speaking of the Trio, Roland Manuel comments that it "shows a quality of mastery quite different from the frenzied melancholy which . . . animates the Quartet;" and he adds, interestingly: "At the end of his life Ravel once compared the two works by declaring in my presence that without much regret he would exchange the technical knowledge of his mature work for the artless strength revealed in his youthful quartet."

The Quartet dates from 1902-3, when Ravel, at twenty-seven, had just emerged from the Conservatoire composition classes of Gédalge and Fauré. The dedication in fact reads: "A mon cher Maître, Gabriel Fauré." The Quartet, like the Sonatine for piano of two years later, adapted classic form to new thematic procedures and invested it with new color devices. The thematic procedures are mostly symmetrical mosaic-like patterns of elongation, rather than dynamic developments à la Beethoven. From Fauré, Ravel learned the device of combining first and second themes for climactic effect; and also the technique found in the chamber music of Franck, d'Indy, and Debussy as well, of adapting the first and second themes of the opening movement to new uses in subsequent movements. The new color devices include exotic melody-formations such as the Dorian and Phrygian modes and the whole-tone scale; the sonorous amplification of melodies in parallel chords; and complex rhythmic schemes such as the combined 3-4 and 6-8 of the scherzo or the quintuple metres of the finale.

Orientalism and even impressionism are words which have been applied to the Quartet — and from the outset the work was widely considered to have been much influenced by Debussy. Certainly here and in the song-cycle *Shéhérazade* of 1902 Ravel comes closer than anywhere else to an affinity with his great contemporary and compatriot. The two men were at this time on quite cordial terms, though they later became less-friendly rivals. Ravel showed Debussy the score of the Quartet, and the latter was entirely enthusiastic, begging the author not to alter one note of his score. (Ravel admitted later that despite this advice he made considerable revisions in the opening movement.)

— I N T E R M I S S I O N —

PIANO QUINTET IN A MAJOR, OP. 81

Dvorak

*Allegro, ma non tanto**Dumka: Andante con moto**Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace**Finale: Allegro*

Besides the present work of his maturity — he wrote it at the age of forty-six, in 1887 — Dvorak also produced an earlier piano quintet, also in A major, dated 1872, which somehow acquired the opus-number 5, even though it was only published in very recent years. "According to the composer's testimony, he destroyed the score, but when he was revising early works in 1887 with a view to having them published, he asked Procházka for his copy, and then made a number of sweeping changes . . . Dvorak seemed dissatisfied with his patching up, for he apparently made no attempt to offer the work to (the publisher) Simrock, and almost immediately he began work on the Op. 81 quintet." — John Clapham, *Antonin Dvorak, Musician and Craftsman*. Thus the two quintets are linked by origin, though not, evidently, by any actual shared materials.

The opening Allegro is constructed on an unhurried cello theme, whose second phrase has an almost Schubertian twist of mode, major to minor. This proves to be a preview of the extensive harmonic voyaging of the movement's later passages. Near the end, some bold chord strokes bring the harmonies back into their original tonal orbit.

A digest of the long, sectional, second movement would read A-B-A-C-A-B-A. The "A" bears the mood and inflection of the Czech folk idiom known as *dumka*. The upward-floating, romantic lines of "B" occur each time in a different major key, and provide a contrast to the brooding, downward, minor-key contours of "A". The central portion, "C", takes a recurrent motive from "A" and develops it in quicker tempo.

The third movement evokes the *dumka's* lively opposite number, the *furiant*, although some authorities maintain it does so in its subtitle only, and not in its actual rhythmic content. A trio-section uses the same motive as the *furiant* proper. As in the first movement, there is considerable rhythmic variety and invention here, for example with one passage running in patterns of five-against-three, and another alternating between 6-8 and 3-4.

The finale, a driving rondo, conveys an infectious image of dancing and merrymaking by details such as the loud "stamping" of its theme's initial beat, and by its maintenance of a lively folkdance quality throughout.

Program Notes by John Beckwith